

**E**ACH hot, sunny day during the recent United States summer, 12-year-olds Felipe Zea, Tamer Syasli and Jeffrey Russo hustled passers-by on a Manhattan footpath to support their addiction.

Their game was cold lemonade for cash. Their habit, a slimy creature with bulging eyes, webbed feet and an inhuman desire to phone home.

His name is "E.T. — The Extra-Terrestrial". And with his oversized, glowing heart, he's been capturing the fancy of moviegoers since he touched down in earth-bound theatres last June.

So much so that at the height of its popularity in the United States, the movie grossed \$240 million at the box office in 15 weeks — more than double its nearest competitor, "Rocky III".

Felipe, Tamer and Jeffrey all did their bit for the incredible phenomenon. As soon as they filled their pockets with the day's lemonade profits, they headed up the block to spend on tickets to the movie — to see it a combined 19 times.

And apart from E.T.'s own theatre business, he has been bringing in much, much more in sales of buttons, T-shirts and other assorted paraphernalia.

Why is the movie so popular?

A psychiatrist cites the timeless appeal of childhood innocence.

A UFO expert says people like the idea of friendly aliens. The young lemonade peddlers call it a movie about love.

The movie is the story of a lovable otherworldly botanist accidentally left behind by his fellow aliens during a nature walk on earth. Chronically homesick and pursued by adults who see his value in cold, scientific terms, E.T. follows a candy trail to the closet of Elliot Taylor, who offers him refuge and friendship.

There, in young Elliot's suburban California home, E.T. goes trick-or-treating, gets soused on beer, learns to speak by watching Sesame Street, and devises a plan to "phone home" and be rescued after

# Fat and ugly, he's making millions

*"E.T. — The Extra-Terrestrial," is a movie which has taken the United States by storm. SCOTT KRAFT in New York looks at how the movie, due to open in Brisbane later this month, has stunned the film industry and changed the American way of life.*

seeing a telephone commercial and a Buck Rogers comic strip.

Since the movie's release, critics have been dusting off their supply of shiny phrases, comparing the film to such classics as "Peter Pan" and "The Wizard of Oz", and delving into the childhood of director Steven Spielberg for clues to the source of all this summertime magic.

"The best Disney film Disney never made," said Variety. "One of the funniest, sweetest love stories in movie history," exulted the Washington Post. "An all-around great movie," said lemonade salesman Jeffrey, after seeing it for the fourth time.

"One reason the movie works so well is that children triumph over adults," says the psychiatrist, Glen Gabbard, who studies movies and their magic.

"The idea that children are somehow superior to adults because they have not yet been corrupted by the value system of the adult world is a really popular theme."



Gary Barker, 56, director of the Space and Unexplained Celestial Events Research Society, says the alien "is quite benign and lovable".

"He's good for those of us who are interested in these things because it gives people a better opinion of what we may be exploring, where before we might have looked like crackpots."

Says Jeffrey: "Adults didn't understand E.T. the way Elliot did. To Elliot, E.T. means friendship and love. Love was the theme of the movie."

And money has been the outcome.

The movie has been cruising along at more than three million dollars a day as the movie climbs Hollywood's list of all-time money-makers, shattering records as it goes.

The E.T. stuffed doll has hit the shelves, and retailers have placed millions of dollars worth of pre-Christmas orders with Kamar International, the toymaker licensed to create it. T-shirts and buttons are on sale in cinema lobbies; E.T. bed sheets — the list is endless.

Perhaps even surer signs of a movie phenomenon are the new catch-phrases E.T. has ushered in, as the movie transcends the cinema and finds its way into everyday life.



For example, in one scene, Elliott returns home from school to find that E.T. has taught himself to talk — and has very definite ideas about what he wants to say.

E.T.: "E.T. home phone."

Elliott: "E.T. phone home? E.T. phone home? E.T. phone home?"

Like "May the Force be with you" from "Star Wars", "E.T. phone home" has jumped off the T-shirts and into real life.

In a Manhattan office building, an executive returned to her desk to find a strange message on her while-you-were-out pad: "E.T. phone home". Standing in a subway token queue across town, two small boys loudly chanted the refrain.

It cost one million dollars to create the odd mixture of ugliness and beauty that is E.T., the visitor from outer space. That's one-tenth the entire cost of the movie. But director Spielberg thinks the money was well spent.



"He's fat and he's not pretty," Spielberg says. "The story is the beauty of his character."

Like Elliot Taylor, Spielberg was a child of suburbia. He got his first movie camera when he was 12. "Walt Disney was my parental conscience and my step-parent was the TV set," he told Time magazine.

He's just 34 but hardly a newcomer; his previous blockbusters include "Close Encounters" and "Jaws", and this year he has scored a hat-trick with "E.T.", "Poltergeist" and a re-release of "Raiders of the Lost Ark".

This movie was to have been a Columbia Pictures production, but the studio let it go. Until early May, Universal Studios, the lucky recipient, thought it might have

a flop on its hands, with only about 500 cinemas agreeing to show it.

Then, a screening in Houston alerted the studio to the movie's potential. It opened in 1100 movie houses — and recovered its 10 million dollar cost three days later.

Part of the reason is kids like Felipe, Tamer and Jeffrey, who live a half-block from one of the three Manhattan cinemas where E.T. has played. But they still have a long way to go before E.T. the alien surpasses "The Empire Strikes Back". They saw that one 50 times.

More than 10,000 letters were received by the E.T. official fan club within three months of the film's American release.

Matthew Ross wants E.T. to come to his fourth birthday party in West Bloomfield, Michigan. But, he warns: "You'll have to sleep at Grandma Rosie's because my brother is scared of you."

Talia Glimmer, five, of Skokie, Illinois, says she loves E.T. and wants his telephone number. James Oleson, of Beaumont, Texas, would "do almost anything" to meet him.

A lot of the mail is for the man behind the E.T. phenomenon, Steven Spielberg. Kids — and adults, too — call him a genius. A few ask for acting jobs or just want to help out around his studio.

Allison Silverman, of Gainesville, Florida says she "made June 23rd Steven Spielberg Day." She adds: "My mother says to tell you I have a very active and creative imagination for a 10-year-old and if you need any ideas just write."

"P.S. I'll give you \$150 to be in one of your movies."

A Florida podiatrist says he's seen E.T. 18 times "and I have no intention of slowing down".



STEVEN SPIELBERG . . . another blockbuster on his hands.